9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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172 Antrim, and excavation in the beaches at Larne and elsewhere has revealed the tools at depths which show that he remained in the area throughout the beach-forming Atlantic period. Some have conjectured that his flint knives and choppers were used for wood-working and boat-building. When fishing failed he had recourse to shell-fish, for the warm seas which replaced the Arctic waters had brought great quantities of edible molluscs to our shores. From the beginning, then, the north-east, the region of the Loughs, was the bridgehead by which overseas movements reached Ireland.

When at length, perhaps under pressure from further incursions from Scotland, the coast-dwellers moved on, it was in the Bann valley, by Lough Neagh and other rivers and lakes that they settled down; and on coastal sites, near the river mouths that the salmon seek, we find, buried in sand, the relics of their "kitchen middens." In places such as the caves at Ballintoy, Co. Antrim, fisherfolk and shell-gatherers continued to cling to their old life century after century, and there can be little doubt, as anthropological research is beginning to show, that the racial characters of these original Irishmen survive in many a coastal area to this day. Readers are referred to papers by Professor T. Walmsley and J. M. Mogey in the *Ulster Journal of Archæology*. The results of a wider survey conducted by the Harvard University Mission to Ireland are awaited.

By low watersheds and lakes the fisherfolk seem to have found their way to the Barrow, to the Shannon and the teeming Corrib of Galway, so that the four provinces of Ireland have a substratum of the oldest stocks in the population. It is tempting to think of the Irish curraghs (Chapter 16) as a relic of this culture: they were covered with hide until recently, and it is noteworthy that even in Lough Neagh, where the curragh has not been recorded in historic times, the fishermen speak of giving their boats a new "hide" when they repair them. Wooden foot traps for catching deer (the so-called otter-traps) which have been found in the bogs and which are figured on some of the Celtic crosses, are presumably

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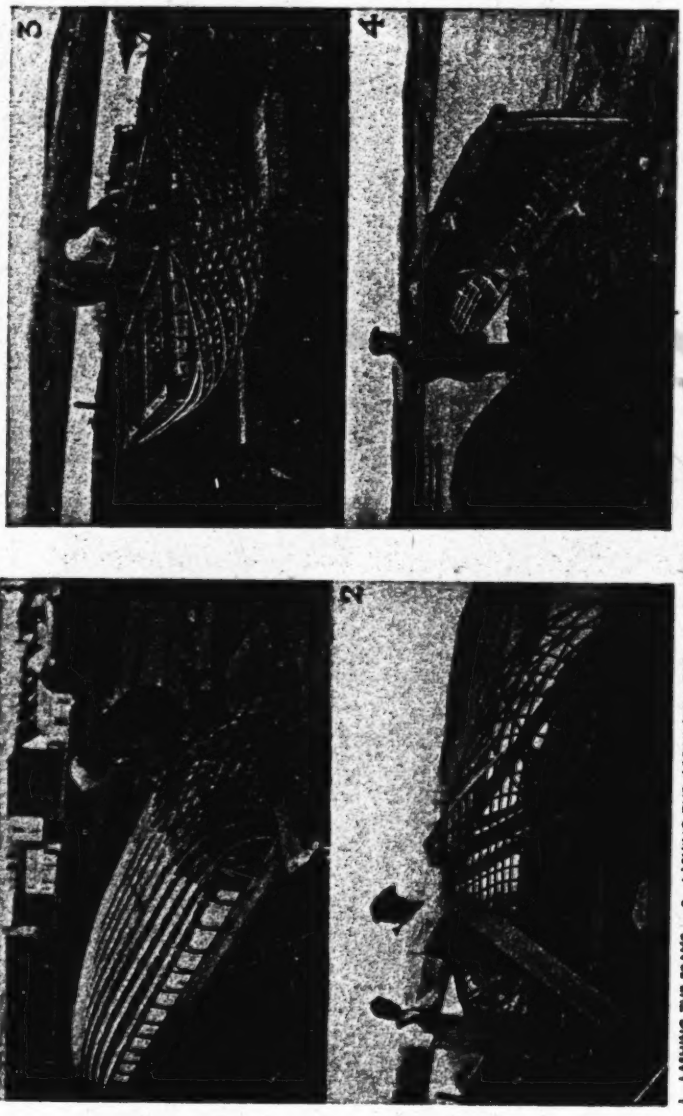

1.—LASHING THE FRAME 2.—LASHING THE "BOW STRINGERS" 3.—POKING COUPLE-ENDS TO THE GUNWALE 4.—COVERED AND READY FOR USE
Plate VI STAGES IN THE MAKING OF A SHEEPHAVEN, CURRAGH, Co. Donegal.

[facing p. 144]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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some twenty years ago, but it was not so. I find that W. F. Wakeman was informed that the two curraghs which he sketched on the Boyne in 1848 were 'probably the last which would be constructed for use on those waters'.[1]

Fortunately James Hornell has published a careful study of *British Coracles and Irish Curraghs*,[2] and the following account is based on his book, supplemented by personal observation. On the level sward—his rustic shipyard—the boat-builder first marks out, with string and pegs, two semicircles of 2 ft. radius, their centres being about twenty inches apart. This will give the basket a mouth measuring 6 ft. by 4 ft., a size determined by the average size of a hide. Joining the two circles into an ellipse, he thrusts into the ground along this line, at intervals of about nine inches, long pointed hazel rods which have been cut the previous autumn after the leaf-fall and allowed to season (Fig. 77). They are pushed about six inches into the ground, at an angle so that they slope outwards somewhat. At one end, the bow-to-be, an extra rod is inserted on either side to give strength where the weight of the kneeling paddleman will fall. Against the ground a strong gunwale of withies is woven on to the rods, and above it a skirting of lighter withies. Opposite rods on each side are now bent over and their thin ends pushed into the ground to secure them temporarily. The fore-and-aft rods are similarly bent over and heavy stones placed on the basket, their weight distributed so as to make a symmetrical frame with the top (that is the bottom of the curragh) as nearly flat as possible. At this stage two or three days are allowed for the frame to set. Then the crossings of the rods are lashed with a continuous twine and again the frame is left weighted. The thin ends of the rods are now broken off at the last lashings in such a way as to leave the bark projecting to prevent the ends from damaging the hide. This, which has meanwhile been softening in the river, is sewn on to the gunwale with twine, the basket having been pulled out of the ground and inverted. The thwart is fixed in position amidship, its ends suspended from the gunwale with withy ties, and withy braces are laced across the stern portion to form a rest for the

[1] W. F. Wakeman, *J.R.S.A.I.* (1872), 76.
[2] J. Hornell, *British Coracles and Irish Curraghs* (1938).

 [Text continues on p. 236]

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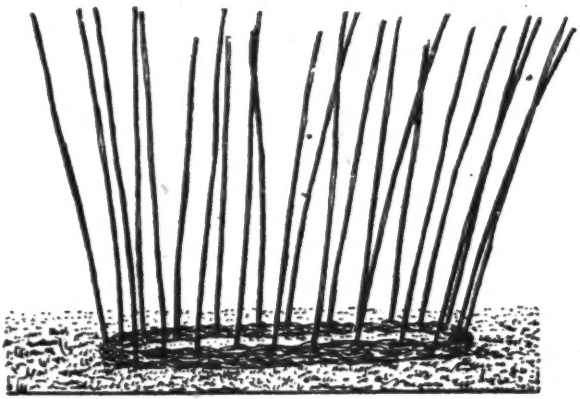

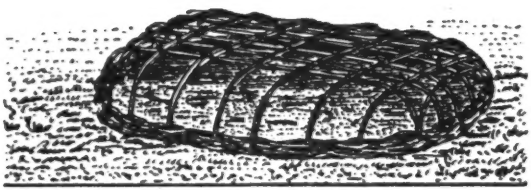

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FIG. 77. The Boyne curragh: construction of basket.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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net. Sitting on the thwart, the boat-builder now drives in the projecting rod-ends to tighten the skin, and trims them to within an inch of the gunwale. Finally he weaves on a protecting mouth of hazel rods which he binds to the gunwale and covers, behind the thwart, with canvas to save the net from damage as it is played out.

The curragh was well adapted to the draft-net salmon fishery at the Oldbridge weir on the Boyne. The following account is based on notes made at Oldbridge in 1947: 'Every half hour of daylight during the season, the curragh makes its brief trip with a draft-net around the pool of water where the salmon lie below the weir. Its virtue lies in its lightness and ease of handling—though not for the novice—in the method of paddling over the bows which allows it to keep close to the banks, and especially in the shallow draught which enables it to pass right under the weir without being swept down by the under-current. The paddler kneels in the deep bows and draws the boat along with rapid strokes alternately to left and right. The net-man sits on the thwart facing backwards and plays out the net, the end of which is held by a third man on the bank. Having reached the far end of the weir the paddler races downstream and returns across the current to join the third man and close the net. The salmon are dispatched with a heavy 'priest' here called the killing-stick.' The fishermen still operate two rectangular fishtraps below the weir, one near each bank, composed of iron gratings which have probably replaced wicker traps since they are known as 'hurdles'. The salmon are taken out with a landing net. A weir has probably been worked continuously at this spot since the Middle Ages, for the monks of Mellifont Abbey operated a weir here.[1]

It comes as a shock, after seeing the little basket-curragh of the Boyne, to recall that the legendary histories tell of much trafficking across the seas in splendid curraghs which carried sails. *The Voyage of Teigue* was made in a curragh constructed of forty oxhides and fitted with twenty-five thwarts.[2] Allowance must be made for picturesque exaggeration, but there is no doubt that the monks of the Irish Church went far afield in

[1] A. E. J. Went, *Co. Louth Arch. Journ.*, 13 (1953), 18–33.
[2] Standish O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica* (1892), 386.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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501 whether seal-skin or the hide of a cow or horse, were untanned. I can add little to the historical account given by Hornell, but [281] it should be noticed that the paddle curragh, covered with horsehide, was common in Erris, Co. Mayo, around 1830[1] and that, to judge from an entry in a Rathlin Island account book of 1760—'paid for one mare's hide for the boat, 1s. and 6d.'—the paddle curragh was used there also.

501 The long rowing curragh with its high pointed nose is widely distributed on the west coast from Donegal to Kerry, 3% and its seaworthy qualities are known to many from its dramatic participation in such films as *Man of Aran* and *Shark Island*. This vessel too is built bottom upwards, but the frame is pegged, not into the ground but into a strong wooden gunwale frame, single or double, which Hornell believes was borrowed, along with the fixed thwarts which give lateral rigidity, from plank-built boats. Yet the method of pivoting the oar on a single tholepin, originally perhaps a strong projecting rib of the curragh frame, rather than in a rowlock, suggests that the rowing curragh has native forerunners. There are many variations in constructional details from one district to another but nearly all the vessels are now built of laths and all are covered with tarred canvas. An emergency repair is contrived by an operation which, if you are a timid passenger, looks like 'burning your boats': the curragh is inverted, the tar around the hole is set alight and a calico patch stuck on when the tar has run. The curraghs are rowed by two, three or four men, and the largest are said to have a carrying capacity of two tons. In Kerry they are masted to carry a small lug sail. A feature of [777] many curraghs is a small bottle of holy water, a protection against misfortune, suspended on a string in the bows.

501 The looms of the long narrow oars overlap so that the oarsman pulls cross-handed. A heavy wooded counterweight, the bool, is attached near the loom, and the oar pivots by means of a round hole in the bool on a single wooden peg, the tholepin, driven into the gunwale (Fig. 78). This method of rowing is found on many lake and river boats in Ireland, perhaps es- [171] pecially in those areas, such as the Shannon and Lough Neagh,

[1] P. Knight, *Erris in the Irish Highlands* (1836), 56. See also *Pococke's Tour* 1752, 64.

 [Text continues on p. 240]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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raghs—and would not be out of place in the fiords. In fact during the nineteenth century, and perhaps from earlier times, many yawls were imported unfinished from Norway, carrying only the bottom (garboard) strakes hollowed from a thick plank. Local materials, always scarce in Ireland in recent centuries, were utilized where possible, holly for the keel (it wears smooth and slides well on beach gravel) ropes of bog fir, and a 'whin root' for the tiller. In Kerry the entire vessel was sometimes built from bog fir: for this purpose as for making roof-frames it had the advantage of impermeability.[1] For off-shore fishing in the Irish Sea the lugger—a name now applied to the motor drifter which has taken its place—developed in the nineteenth century under the influence of visiting 'nickies', the Manx name for Cornish lug-sailed herring boats, said to have been given because so many of their crews were named Nicholas. On the west coast the Galway hookers are now, despite their name, used almost entirely for carrying turf and livestock. The lug-sailed pookhauns used for fishing are a variant of the Irish Sea yawl, of clumsy construction thanks to limited resources and unsuitable building materials.

On many inland loughs and larger rivers dug-out boats not much different from those of the Bronze Age seem to have continued to be made into the seventeenth century and probably even later in places. The most serious problem to be solved in hollowing out a solid log is how to keep the sides and bottom of the vessel of even thickness. Some of the ancient dug-outs recovered from the Irish lakes and rivers show that their makers had availed themselves of a method which is practised today in parts of Indonesia. The method is to bore holes through the shell and plug the holes with pegs of the right length to serve as gauges. The plugged holes observed in the bottom of many an Irish dug-out have been explained as drainage holes, but the pegs would in that case have been left protruding, and one hole would surely have sufficed. As the country lost its forests it must have become difficult to obtain trees of the right size and kind, especially oak, for boat making, and by the eighteenth century, it seems, plank boats retaining some features of the dug-out were substituted. Around 1800 the salmon-fishing cots

[1] A. Young, *Tour*, 2, 89.